

PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments on the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians : Genesis, Chapter the ninth.

CREATION OF RAINBOWS.

IF we take the assertions made in the Bible for truth, we shall be compelled to admit that the former or primitive state of the world, was very different from what it is at present ; —that the laws of nature have undergone several essential alterations, and that some of the philosophic facts with which we are at present acquainted, had in ancient days no existence. By the account in this ninth chapter of Genesis, one would suppose that the Rainbow, the natural causes of which are well understood, was of post deluvian creation—verse twelve, “and God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, for perpetual generations. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth, and it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud : and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you, and every living creature of all flesh—and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” By this passage it appears that God created the Rainbow at that time, and for a special purpose, and that in an arbitrary manner he set it in the clouds to give consolatory assurances to an ignorant and wicked world, that he would never become so far out of hu-

mour again, as to send another flood. But how is this business of creating the bow at that particular time to be reconciled to the principles of philosophy, or the properties of the natural world? The sun existed before—the waters also had their being—exhalations, evaporations, and of course, showers of rain must have been the consequences. The properties of refrangibility and reflexibility must also have been essential in the rays of the sun—under these circumstances every one knows, who knows anything about it (christians only excepted) that the appearance of rainbows, must have been unavoidable. But it is said that this bow was created at that particular time to answer another special and important purpose, that of the refreshing the memory of the creator, and preventing him in another fit of anger from drowning the world, “and the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant, &c.” And did these Bible makers really believe that their God was so stupidly forgetful, as to require a thing of this sort to induce him to do his duty? This is degrading him to the condition of some foolish people, and children who tie a string round their finger, in order that they may remember at some particular time what they otherwise expected to forget. When the character of the almighty thus suffers by the descriptions contained in this revealed system of religion, it is high time for all honest believers to enquire into the grounds of their confidence, and the reasons why they believe a book to be divine which is destitute of all the essential features of pure and genuine theism.

TO suppose that God can alter the settled laws of nature which himself formed, is to suppose his will and wisdom mutable—and that they are not the best laws of the most perfect being—for if he is the author of them, they must be as immutable as he is—so that he cannot alter them to make them better, and will not alter them to make them worse.—Neither of these can be agreeable to his attributes. If the course of nature is not the best, the only best, and fittest that could be—it is not the offspring of perfect wisdom, nor was it settled by divine will—and then God is not the author of nature, if the laws thereof can be altered: for if the laws of nature are God's laws, he cannot alter them in any degree without being in some degree changeable. If all nature is under the direction of

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an immutable mind, what can make a change in that direction? God must be allowed to be eternal, therefore he necessarily exists, and is necessarily whatever he is—therefore it is not in his own power to change himself—it is his perfection to be immutable—for if his nature could possibly change, it might err—for whatever is changeable, is not perfect. Besides, an eternal and perfect nature must necessarily be unchangeable. And as long as the first moving cause is the same, all subsequent and second causes can never vary.

If God, by length of duration becomes better or wiser himself—then he does wisely to make his works alterable as his will is—and if his will is alterable, he does so—this is as a wise man, who is growing in wisdom, does: but if the same state of perfection be always in God, he does always the best; and has one end and design in every different age and duration, and always pursues that one, and the same best end and design, by one and the same best means—which man cannot do, because man is not perfect; but perfect wisdom and power can do no otherwise than pursue the best end in the best manner—therefore cannot alter either.—If God ever determined for moral ends and reasons to interpose, if needful, by a different method, than that of his standard laws—it must be either because he could not foresee the consequences, which is like blundering in the dark, or he foresaw it would be needful—and then it looks like a blunder in the design, and contrivance; or he foreknew and determined his own works should not answer his own ends, without his mending works, which is worst of all. That God, either with or without design, let men alone to go on in their old way, till they were ruined, and could not recover themselves, nor he them, without extraordinary interposition of supernatural power, is a supposition injurious to the attributes of the deity. If God designed, at certain periods of duration, to mend his ordinary by an extraordinary work to procure from man extraordinary faith and dependence on him—it proves indeed they depend on absolute will, not on absolute wisdom—that by his common laws he suffered man to become totally bad, that he might get honour by mending him, if possible, in an uncommon manner. It becomes a wise governor that his laws be all the same, and his government be all of a piece. Laws that require altering and mending, imply a defect in the lawgiver.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROSPECT.

IN addition to the judicious remarks in your 12th number, on the absurd story of Noah's flood, in the 7th chapter of Genesis, I send you the following:

The 2d verse makes God to say to Noah, "Of every *clean* beast thou shalt take unto thee by sevens, the male and his female, and of every beast that are *not clean*, by two, the male and his female."

Now, there was no such thing as beasts *clean* and *unclean* in the time of Noah. Neither were there any such people as Jews or Israelites at that time, to whom that distinction was a law. The law, called the law of Moses, by which a distinction is made, beasts clean and unclean, was not until several hundred years after the time that Noah is said to have lived. The story therefore detects itself, because the inventor of it forgot himself, by making God make use of an expression that could not be used at the time. The blunder is of the same kind, as if a man in telling a story about America a hundred years ago, should quote an expression from Mr. Jefferson's inaugural speech as if spoken by him at that time.

My opinion of this story is the same as what a man once said to another, who asked him in a drawling tone of voice, "Do you believe the account about No-ah?" The other replied in the same tone of voice, *ah-no*.

T. P.

Man is only unhappy because he is ignorant of Nature.

HIS mind is so infected by prejudice, that he appears condemned to continual error. He is so attached to the blind opinions that he imbibes in his infancy, that it is not without the utmost difficulty that he can divest himself of them. A dangerous leaven mixes with all his knowledge, and renders it necessarily false, obscure and wavering. He seeks to render himself unhappy, by wishing to range out of his sphere, and to carry his researches beyond the visible world, notwithstanding that continual and reiterated obstacles are uselessly warning him of the folly of his enterprize. He would

be a metaphysician before he is an experimental philosopher. He quits realities to meditate on chimeras. He neglects experience to feed on hypothesis and conjecture. He dares not cultivate his reason, because early means have been taken to prevent him. He pretends to know his fate in the imaginary regions of another life, before he considers the means of rendering himself happy in the world where he at present resides. In short, man disdains the study of nature, to pursue phantoms which resemble the Will-with-a-Wisp, that at once terrifies and dazzles the benighted traveller, and which make him quit the simple road of truth, without pursuing which, he can never arrive at happiness.

It becomes then, of the utmost importance, to find out the means, by which we may destroy these delusions, that can only serve to mislead us. It is time to draw remedies from nature, against the evils and mischiefs that enthusiasm has brought upon us. Reason, guided by experience, must at last attack in their strong holds, those prejudices to which the human race have so long been the victims. It is time, that this reason, so unjustly degraded, should quit that cowardice, which has rendered it accessory to falsehood and delirium. Truth is invariable; it is necessary to man—it can never harm him—his necessities make him feel it sooner or later—we must then discover it to mortals—we must shew them its charms, that we may disgust them, with that disgraceful worship, which leads them into errors and has but too often usurped their homage, under the mask of truth. Its lustre can only wound the enemies of the human race, whose power has alone subsisted, through the darkness and ignorance which they have every where diffused over the mind of man.

It is not to these perverse beings that truth speaks.—Her voice can only be heard by those honest hearts accustomed to reflection, who have sensibility enough to lament the numberless calamities that political and religious tyranny has brought upon the earth, who are sufficiently enlightened to view with horror the immense chain of misfortunes with which error has in all times overwhelmed mankind. It is to error that must be attributed those insupportable chains that tyrants and priests have forged for all nations. It is to error that must be attributed the slavery that the people of almost every country have fallen into, and whom nature designed should pursue their happiness by the most perfect freedom. It is to error that must be attributed those religious terrors that have every where petrified man with fear, or made him destroy himself for chimeras. It is to error that

must be attributed those inveterate hatreds, those barbarous persecutions, those continual massacres, those dreadful tragedies, of which the earth has been too often made the theatre, under the pretence of serving the interests of heaven. In short, it is to error, consecrated by religion, that must be attributed that ignorance and uncertainty in which man ever finds himself with regard to his most evident duties, his clearest rights, and the most demonstrable truths. Man is in almost every climate, a poor degraded captive, destitute of grandeur of soul, of reason or of virtue, whom his inhuman gaolers have never permitted to see the light of day.

Let us then endeavour to dispel those clouds of ignorance that prevent man from marching with a firm and steady pace through the path of life. Let us inspire him with courage, and with respect for his reason, that he may learn to know himself; that he may learn to know his legitimate rights—that he may learn to consult his experience, and not an imagination led astray by authority—that he may renounce the prejudices of his infancy—that he may found his morals upon his nature, his wants, and the real advantages that society procures him—that he may dare to love himself—that he may learn to pursue his true happiness, by promoting that of others. In short, that he may become a reasonable and virtuous being—that he may become happy—and that he may no longer occupy himself with reveries, either dangerous, or useless. And if he must have his chimeras, that he may at least permit others to form theirs after their own fashion; that he may persuade himself, that it is of the utmost importance to the inhabitants of this world, to be just, kind, and peaceable—and, that nothing is more immaterial, than their manner of thinking on objects not accessible to reason.

The sole object of this work, is to bring man back to nature, to render his reason dear to him, to make him adore virtue, or dispel those mists of prejudice that hide from him the only road that can really conduct him to that felicity he desires. These are the real views of the author—satisfied with the sincerity of his intention, he presents to the reader nothing but those ideas which a long and serious reflection has convinced him to be absolutely necessary to the repose and happiness of man, and favourable to the progress of the human understanding. He invites the reader to an examination of his principles—and far from having a wish to wound the sacred ties of morality, he maintains he shall

strengthen them, and place virtue on those altars from which she has hitherto been driven, by imposture, enthusiasm, and religious terror, for the introduction of the most dangerous phantoms.

Ready to descend into the grave, which old age has rendered probable for some time past, the author protests in the most solemn manner, to have had no other objects in his labours, than to promote the good of his fellow-creatures. His only ambition is, to merit the approbation of those very few partisans of truth, and honest souls, that sincerely search after it. He writes not to those who are deaf to the voice of reason, who judge of things only by their vile interests, and fatal prejudices. His cold remains will fear neither clamours, nor their resentments, so terrible to those, who while living, dare announce to them the truth.

MIRABAUD.

APHORISMS.

IF Christ came to send a sword, and not peace on earth, it were better he had staid at home.

THE Christian religion is a ladder by which dishonest men elevate themselves to power, to answer their own selfish and interested purposes.

THINK freely, speak with candour, and do no violence to mankind.

Revealed religion charges God with anger—this example has inspired man with those irascible passions which destroy all virtue and human happiness.

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